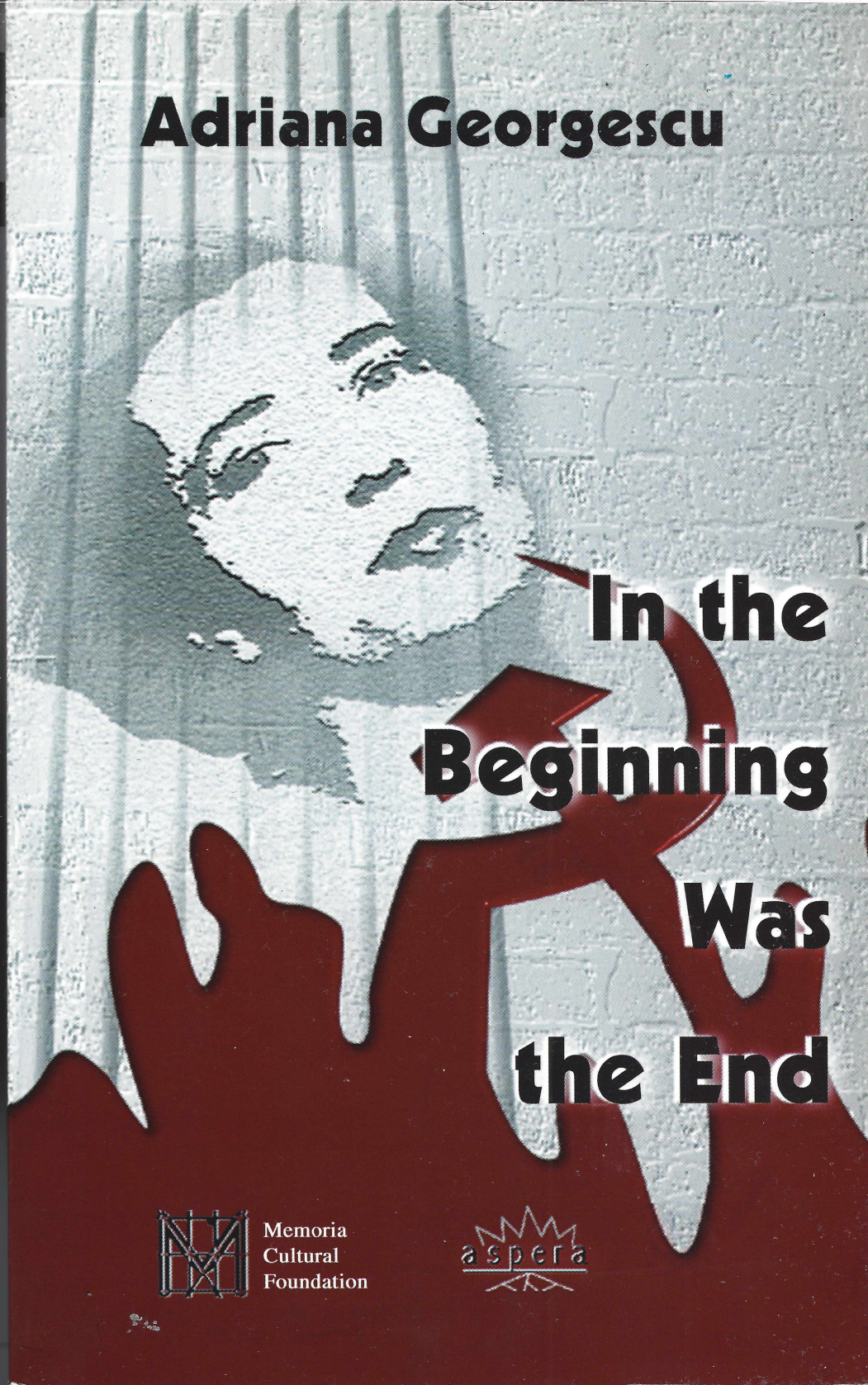
Adriana Georgescu



In the Beginning Was the End

Memoria Cultural Foundation

aspera

"Adriana Georgescu is a symbol of the obstinacy with which Romanian students and youth in general defied the Soviet occupation after the war. Near Mihai Fărcășanu's unmistakable silhouette leading the Liberal Youth demonstration, and inseparable from it, was Adriana's golden hair, athletic slenderness, confident laugh. Newspaperwoman, very young attorney, just out of the University, then General Rădescu's Chief of staff, the anti-communist resistance found in her an emblematic figure. She also became one of the first sacrificial victims of the first show trial in the long series that Nicolschi imposed upon Romania, a series that was to lead to the unfinished symphony of horror at Pitești."

- Monica Lovinescu, essayst and literary critic, Paris, 1991

"I have read *In the Beginning Was the End* with great pleasure and profit. It is an extremely valuable and original exposition of conditions of the time. It offers insight into the atmosphere of those years and into the new order of things from the personal perspective of a sensitive observer and participant."

- Keith Hitchins, Professor of History,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003

"Adriana Georgescu's defiance in the face of Communist repression is testimony to the courage shown by a number of her generation and a stark reminder of the abandonment by the West of those who strove to uphold the very democratic principles for which the Second World War had been fought. Once cannot read this moving account without a sense that Romania's return to the democratic fold is a vindication of Adriana Georgescu's stand."

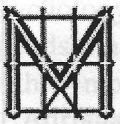
- Dennis Deletant, Professor of Romanian Studies,
School of Slavonic and East European Studies
University College London, 2003

ISBN 973-99523-8-0

Adriana Georgescu

In the Beginning Was the End

Introduction by *Monica Lovinescu*
Translated from Romanian by
Dr. *Dan Golopenția*
Edited by *Guy* and *Lidia Bradley*
Notes edited by *Marius Oprea*



Memoria Cultural Foundation
Bucharest, RO

The Aspera Educational Foundation
Boston, MA

Cover design by Dora Ionescu
Maps by Iuliana Barnea

Copyright for the English translation and edition: Adriana Georgescu, 1951 and The Aspera Romanian Educational Foundation, 2003

Copyright for the Romanian edition: Adriana Georgescu, 1951 and Humanitas 1992; Adriana Georgescu, 1951 and Fundatia Culturala Memoria, 1999

Copyright for the French edition: Librairie Hachette, 1951

The English text is a translation of the Romanian edition published by Editura Memoria in 1999, ISBN: 973-99523-0-5

The translation of this book into English, as well as its production, printing, distribution and marketing has been made possible by The Aspera Romanian Educational Foundation of Boston, MA, USA. Founder and president: Lidia Bradley; Email: contact@aspera.ro Web site: www.aspera.ro

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naţionale a României
GEORGESCU, ADRIANA
In the Beginning Was the End / Adriana Georgescu; introduction by Monica Lovinescu; translated from Romanian by Dr. Dan Golopenţia; edited by Guy and Lidia Bradley; notes edited by Marius Oprea - Bucureşti: Editura Fundaţiei Culturale „Memoria", 2004
ISBN 973-99523-8-0

I. Lovinescu, Monica (pref.)
II. Golopenţia, Dan (trad.)
III. Bradley, Guy (ed.)
IV. Bradley, Lidia (ed.)
V. Oprea Marius (ed.)

821.135.1-31821.135.1-31

A NOTE ABOUT THE ENGLISH EDITION

This English edition of Adriana Georgescu's book, "In the Beginning Was the End", was created as part of the Romanian Oral History Project supported by the Aspera Foundation, and hosted on the Internet at www.memoria.ro.

It is an eye-witness account of the communists' rapid takeover of Romania at the end of World War II and of the workings of Stalinist-type propaganda, a victim's rendition of the first show trial of that period, a memoir of years spent in communist prisons (1945 – 1947), and a tale of escape and exile. To our knowledge, this book, written in 1949 - 1950, was the first to describe the mechanisms by which the Communists effectively destroyed the other political parties and Romanian civil society in the years after the war, as a prerequisite to establishing the Soviet-supported totalitarian rule that lasted in Romania until the fall of the Ceauşescu regime in December of 1989. This description is done by a lucid observer who was not only at the center of events, but, trained as a lawyer and journalist, was also politically sophisticated.

It was also the first book to describe the treatment of political prisoners in the Romanian Gulag. The fate of victims of the early communist repression is portrayed in clear, vivid lines. So is the inhumanity of their interrogators. And yet, in writing about prison life, the author, then a young woman in her twenties, transcends the horrors and finds at times a fresh, even humorous tone. The psychology and language of the common criminals with whom she spends time in squalid, over-crowded cells come to life, rendered with sympathy and warmth.

Adriana Georgescu wrote "In the Beginning Was the End" in Paris directly after her escape from Romania in 1948, with the in-

tention of "opening the eyes" of Westerners as to what was going on behind the Iron Curtain. Monica Lovinescu[1] translated it into French while it was being written. The French edition of *"Au commencement était la fin"* was published by Hachette in 1951. Forty years later, when, after the fall of communism, the book could finally be published in Romania, it had to be translated into Romanian from French. Humanitas published a first edition in 1992, and a second edition followed in 1999 under the supervision of Micaela Ghițescu of the Memoria Cultural Foundation. The present translation into English by Dr. Dan Golopenția, with input from Guy Bradley, follows the 1999 edition of the Romanian text.

Growing up in Romania in the sixties, hearing one version of history from my parents and being taught a different one in school, I started wondering how the regime change from a constitutional monarchy to a communist dictatorship actually occurred. I must have been about twelve years old when I first heard, from my parents, whispered accounts of Adriana Georgescu's suffering. My father was related to her, and I have fond memories of her mother and sisters, whom we used to visit at Sinaia and in Bucharest. However, even the child I was then could sense, underlying their warmth and friendliness, suffering and fear. After leaving Romania in the early 1980s I was often asked to explain to foreign friends how Romanian communism came to develop its extremely dictatorial form. Presenting Adriana Georgescu's account in English is the best answer I can give.

I met Adriana in 2001 in England. At over eighty, and in spite of the continually recurring depressions she has suffered as a result of her years of torture and imprisonment, her energy shines through her eyes, it resounds in her voice. She has never stopped denouncing totalitarianism: of characters like hers the stuff of resistance to tyranny and manipulation is made. Her book is relevant today, and will be relevant at every point in history when ideology prevails over civil liberties.

This edition benefits from the research of the Institute of Recent Romanian History (IRIR), whose historians Marius Oprea and Stejarel Olaru created and edited the explanatory notes; from the research of the Memoria Cultural Foundation, which allowed us to use the maps of Romania showing the locations of prisons and areas

of activity of post-war resistance groups; from the generous advice of Professor Sanda Golopenția of Brown University; from the thoughtful assistance of Mircea Ivănoiu of the Aspera ProEdu Foundation in Brasov and the technical help of Simona Ceauşu, who typed the translated manuscript.

Lidia Gheorghiu Bradley,
The Aspera Foundation, Boston

September 27, 2003

Notes:

[1] *Monica Lovinescu* (b. November 19th, 1923, in Bucharest): literary critic, writer, essayist and radio analyst living in Paris since 1947. A strong voice of the Romanian exile and a harsh critic of the communist regime, she contributed for decades to Radio Free Europe broadcasts. In the 1980's the Romanian political police *Securitate* tried to assassinate her.

INTRODUCTION

I met Adriana Georgescu again in April 1990 in University Square in Bucharest. I knew that she was now living on the other side of the Channel in a British town. That she had changed her name, after a new marriage, to Westwater. That her appearance had been changed not only by the passing of time but also by the incurable trauma of her prison experience. I had followed year after year her evolution and her tragedy. Still she seemed to belong amidst the youth here. When they sang with humour – a humour pierced by bullets – the *"golanilor"* anthem[1]. And then, kneeling, when they picked up another refrain, "Oh Lord, please come Lord, to see what is left of the humans". Between the lyrical-revolutionary illusion of the beginning and the disconsolate premonition of the end was Adriana's real place.

Adriana Georgescu was a symbol of the obstinacy with which Romanian students and youth in general defied the Soviet occupation after the war. Near Mihai Fărcăşanu's[2] unmistakable silhouette leading the Liberal Youth demonstrations, and inseparable from it, was Adriana's golden hair, athletic slenderness, confident laugh. Newspaperwoman, very young attorney, just out of the University, then General Rădescu's[3] chief of staff, the anti-communist resistance found in her an emblematic figure. She was also to become one of the first sacrificial victims of the first show trial in the long series that Nicolschi[4] imposed upon Romania, a series that was to lead to the unfinished symphony of horror at Piteşti[5]. That diabolical stage hadn't yet been reached, but even these initial exercises had been enough to change Adriana's whole existence, henceforth accompanying all the stages of her life with their unending nightmare.

When we met in Paris at the end of 1948, despite what she had been through, Adriana seemed unchanged. She was still General Rădescu's Chief of Staff, stopping here on the road of exile that was to take him to the United States. Adriana could still laugh as well as before, she hadn't given up hope. Of course it was also true that all of us, students or recent graduates, in Paris in sufficient numbers to turn Boulevard St. Michel into a sort of Calea Victoriei away from Romania, we all shared the same recklessness of our age. I only knew one exception: Virgil Ierunca[6]. He walked among us actively pessimistic and was the only one whom I never heard using at New Year or other holidays the ritual formula, "Next year in Bucharest". I myself had come to Paris with the firm belief that Malraux[7] could be convinced to set up international brigades to free Romania.

But I had come to a Paris that was convalescing after one war and unable to prepare for another, and I was among Marxists, Marxist sympathizers, communists, and other fellow travellers for whom Moscow was an anti-fascist Mecca. Among the representatives of the Great Powers who made up the Nüremberg Tribunal, the representatives of the Gulag were trying the heads of the Nazi concentration camps.

One couldn't talk about the satellite-ization of the East without being labeled a fascist. Our stubborn refusal to admit to the division of Europe and the flagrant injustice of the peace was not dulled by aggressive contact with reality. We printed newspapers, we agitated, we held meetings, we knocked on all the doors, we wanted to open eyes that had chosen to remain closed. Such an out-of-sync attitude cannot be explained only by our youth. A very mature Grigore Gafencu[8] did the same thing at a different level. In the United States Committees of the Captive Nations were formed – we even had two, one led by C. Vişoianu[9], the other by General Rădescu and Mihai Fărcăşanu. The legitimacy of regimes that came to power in falsified elections seemed easy to challenge.

The word exile is actually misleading: there are a number of very different types of exiles. Ours was mainly made up of people who had run not to escape, but rather to continue fighting.

And we kept fighting. Without weapons, without those tanks in which we still dreamed of returning to Romania. We fought with

our pens, with our words. Only in 1956, when we saw in amazement that the bloody suppression of the Hungarian Revolution took place without any reaction from the Western Powers (a single United Nations plane carrying the General Secretary of the UN to the Budapest airport, in answer to Imre Nagy's[10] desperate call, would have probably been enough to stop the slaughter and to change the course of history), only then did we realize that our wish was in vain. And since then there have been many types of exiles. The ones determined to continue – true courage, said Simone Weil, is to fight when there is no hope – did it, each in his own way, living their life as a hiatus between what was, and what had almost no chance of coming into being. Others more or less adapted. Others assimilated. And in the waves of exile that followed some were strictly "economical". Seldom "political". In 1956 there occurred the first great loss from the first great exile: Grigore Gafencu, while coming back from a radio station where he had launched a last appeal to save a revolution which could have spread beyond Hungary's borders, was brought down by a heart attack.

But it wasn't yet 1956 when I saw Adriana again in Paris. We still lived with the conviction that eyes must be opened. In the cafés of St. Germain-des-Près, instead of talking about existentialism and looking for Sartre and his cohorts, we came up with a strategy. Adriana would write an eyewitness account, and I would translate it into French. The sooner the better. The urgency was measured by the number of prisons that were filling up in Romania. We agreed that she would bring me every day what she had written the previous night. When she didn't have time the night before, she would write at my house and I would translate it on the spot. "My house" was in fact an attic room ("chambre de bonne" the French call it), the kind poor Parisian students had in those days. And for the first time in my life I was quite poor. But I admit I didn't completely dislike this bohemian lifestyle, which I hadn't known in Romania: university eating halls, rooms without running water, unlit staircases.

There, at 44 Boulevard Raspail, Adriana climbed daily to the seventh floor, and of course there was no lift. Sometimes with three or four pages written in a hurry, sometimes without any so she had to write while I prepared something to eat. Because Romania had

broken cultural ties with France we were left without stipends and had only minimal student aid. I didn't really know how to behave when one is left with nothing, but for some reason poverty was connected in my mind with *mămăligă*[11]. So we looked in all sorts of specialty stores for corn flour, which was rather expensive in those days, out of which, I due to my ignorance, Adriana due to her extreme concentration on the manuscript, we made a rather poor mămăligă. We ended up with some lumpy stuff which we complemented with American chocolate. Various American charitable associations sent food and second hand clothing parcels for East European refugees. They shipped it all together so that our chocolate smelled of... moth balls. We smoked and we drank, Adriana tea and I coffee. And we worked.

When she left, usually late, down the unlit staircase, Adriana sometimes dropped the pages that had been translated, or threw them crumpled into the waste-paper basket. They weren't very important to her, she wrote with a single goal in mind: "to open eyes". During our breaks we behaved childishly or even ridiculously: we put Romanian words to the French Partisan song and imagined ourselves in the first battalions that would throw open the prison doors. We projected the obsessive, in those years, images of the French resistance onto the Romanian reality. And after an intermezzo of hallucinations we would start again: she to write, I to translate.

When she got to her first experiences with prison and torture, Adriana put her fountain-pen down. Her whole body started to tremble. Her teeth were chattering. (This trembling has accompanied her throughout her life, it has been her eternal present.) I gave her another cup of tea. I opened the window that looked out over the Paris roofs. But she was still in the darkness of the Bucharest prisons. Before starting to write again, she told me, still trembling, all the things that she couldn't put down on paper. Then gradually she calmed down and wrote, torturously, sparely, allusively about the unnamable. She threw those pages into the fire immediately after I had translated them into French, seemingly believing that by burning them she could also consume her past. The paper turned into ash but her burden remained.

But even among her prison memories were episodes that were not tragic. She remembered with humour and tender emotion her prostitute and thief cellmates. In order to translate Romanian slang into French, a friend introduced me to one of his resistance comrades who talked only in argot. Plain, massive, primeval even, seemingly still holding in his hand the machine gun which he hadn't yet completely set aside (he told me he kept his weapons hidden under his bed), a simple and courageous man – he had also been behind bars for honourable reasons – he told me everything he knew. Thanks to him the Dâmboviţa[12] felons, thieves, and prostitutes were able to talk just like those on the shores of Seine. A single word remained unchanged: "rag" – the friendly way Adriana's prison-mates called her. I remember it because Adriana and I adopted this name and used it later in our conversations, and after her departure for England in our mail. Never "dear Adriana" or "dear Monica". We used "rag" instead as a sort of a link – unconscious? – between what we were hoping for then and what was never going to happen.

Adriana busied herself not only with the writing of the book, finished in record time due to our rhythm and working style. She was always active. As a member of the Liberal Party. As Rădescu's secretary. She made things clear to politicians, newspapermen, she went to meetings, she kept talking, she kept talking. At the trial brought by the heads of the democratic parties from East and Central Europe against the communist author of a book that was making waves in those days, *"L'Internationale des Traîtres"*, Adriana, in her deposition, warned the West that if it failed to do something for the "other Europe" it would eventually be faced with neurotic societies. Her prophecy, based in part on her own suffering, was confirmed by the state of Romanian society after 1989.

The book was published by Hachette in 1951. I signed the translation with a pseudonym (Claude Pascal). I had a hostage in Romania: my mother. In spite of this she was arrested in 1958, at the age of 70, sentenced to 25 years, and in the end murdered in prison through the denial of medical care. Not, however, because my pen name was deciphered, but absurdly (and what wasn't absurd in communist Romania?) for "espionage". How? By sending me

printed silk scarves on which she supposedly drew... military maps. Needless to say, my mother didn't know how to draw maps and I never received any scarves from her.

Despite the leftist milieu, Au commencement était la fin was favourably received in the French press. Adriana assumed that the Romanian Embassy bought the whole edition so that the book wouldn't reach the public. I don't know if this was the case, totally or partially, although such "mass purchases" were used by the communists at the time. In any case the whole edition sold out.

What is left to say is why I think the publication in Romania of Adriana Georgescu's book is salutary and of current interest. Salutary because we suffer, and are going to suffer for a long time, from Romania's image in the media as the Eastern European country with the weakest dissident movement. And, with a few well-known exceptions, this is a fairly accurate description of the last decades. But not of the first decades after the war. The resistance movement in Romania after 1944 was probably more numerous, more unified, and more determined that that in neighbouring countries. And longer lasting. In September 1947 in Vienna, after I had clandestinely crossed a border (even though my passport was in order... but that is another story that I am not going to tell here), I was in the office of a French officer in order to get a new visa in my passport already filled with stamps. Behind his desk there was a huge map of Romania with small flags marking the resistance bases in the Carpathian mountains. The officer wanted to know if I was aware of any other resistance centers. I wasn't. I was aware though of the resistance that was more or less open in society ("civil society" we would call it today; and it existed in those days).

I was the delegate of the Literature Department of the University of Bucharest to a large student congress in May 1947 in Cluj. The communists and the various "fronts" behind which they were hiding wanted to force us to stigmatize and "fire" the professors resistant to the new order. We withstood the pressure so well (universities from the whole country were represented) that the congress ended without any positive results for the communists and with the Royal Anthem being sung in a large hall filled with students. I was lodged in the medical student dormitory, and we plotted in long sleepless nights what tactics to follow. Among the intel-

lectuals there was the same determined attitude. Together with Ştefan Augustin Doinaş[13] and other members of the Sibiu circle[14] we went to see Lucian Blaga[15]. Blaga wanted to know details about how the Bucharest writers and university professors were surviving. His long periods of silence were punctuated by anxiety and determination. "Silent as a swan", Blaga was listening to the future.

I think this initial resistance has to be emphasized in order to re-establish the truth, to honour those who are no longer with us, and to rid ourselves of one of our rare undeserved complexes (so many are justified!).

As far as the current interest of this testimony goes... I assume it isn't necessary to dwell on it. The readers will judge for themselves. For me it was enough to meet Adriana again in University Square in 1990.

There are some essential differences though.

In 1945 we had a civil society, but also the Red Army, in a land abandoned to Soviet "influence". In 1989-1990, the society, with a few well-known and wonderful exceptions, seems ill, "neurotic", Adriana would say. On the other hand, Europe is no longer divided, and the Red Army is busy at home.

In 1945 everything depended on foreigners. Now everything is in our hands. In principle, there is no reason for the beginning to be the end.

Monica Lovinescu
Paris, March 1991

Notes:

[1] *Golan* (pl. *golani*): literally, a 'have-not', a 'vagabond'. After 1990, when President Ion Iliescu, a former high-ranking communist leader, called the students and intellectuals protesting against his government in University Square *golani*, the term acquired a positive connotation, even becoming a badge of honor. President Iliescu later

apologized publicly. Two young folk singers, Cristian Paţurcă and Petre Constantin, known as "Dr. Barbi", composed the so-called '*golanilor* anthem', which was sung by the thousands of protesters in the square. Its refrain was "Better to be a vagabond than a traitor / A hooligan than a dictator / Better to be a have-not than a party activist / Better to be dead than a communist." Many well-known Romanian intellectuals, including Alexandru Paleologu, a writer and Romania's Ambassador to Paris at that time, declared themselves to be '*golani*'.

[2] *Mihai Fărcăşanu* (?-1987): charismatic president of the Romanian Liberal Youth Organisation, writer (pen name: Mihai Villara) and journalist (Editor in Chief of *Viitorul*, official newspaper of the National Liberal Party), escaped Romania in 1947 and took refuge in France and then in the United States, where he was a founding member of the Romanian National Committee and then succeeded General Nicolae Rădescu as President of the League of Free Romanians.

[3] *Nicolae Rădescu* (1876-1953): general, Chief of the Great General Staff until October 15th, 1944. Prime Minister between December 6th, 1944 and February 28th, 1945. He tried to quell the communist agitations, but was forced to resign. He took refuge at the British Legation in Bucharest and, in 1946, managed to fly out of the country to Cyprus. His daring escape surprised even the Allies, who, in order to avoid more tension between them and the Soviets, kept him for nine months on the island in a British refugee camp, before allowing him to emigrate to the United States via Lisbon. In Washington, General Rădescu organized the Romanian National Committee (Comitetul National Roman, CNR) in 1948, under the patronage of Michael I, King of Romania. CNR initially consisted of ten members, representing the three main Romanian democratic parties of the interwar period: the National Peasant Party, the Liberal Party, and the Independent Socialist Party and acted as a substitute for a post-World War II Romanian democratic government in exile. It was one of the nine organizations that made up the Assembly of Captive European Nations. After leaving CNR in 1950, due to policy conflicts, General Rădescu founded the League of Free Romanians. He was head of this organization for only a short time, since in 1952 he developed an illness of the lungs that could not be diagnosed. He died one year later, on May 16th, 1953, in New York.

[4] *Alexandru Nicolschi* (1914-1992): KGB officer. After Romania was occupied by the Red Army in 1944, he was charged with arresting the leaders of the democratic parties. He rose to the rank of general and became deputy director of the *Securitate*. He was in charge

of special operations of the *Securitate* against political opponents, and directly responsible for the crimes and torture carried out by the communist political police during the first ten years of its existence, participating in person at interrogations considered 'of importance'. It is therefore significant that he personally and savagely tortured Adriana Georgescu, General Rădescu's former chief of staff. Retired in 1961 as a major general. After the 1989 revolution he 'justified' his crimes by saying: "Who knew that 1989 was ever going to happen?". He died on the very day when, after long delays, the Romanian authorities, pressured by the civil society, decided to prosecute him.

[5] *Piteşti Prison*: best known political prison in Romania. It was the location of the Piteşti Experiment, a process to 'reeducate' political detainees. Of unparalleled cruelty, it was basically brainwashing by torture. The experiment took place under great secrecy between 1949-1952 in a number of Romanian prisons, but was perfected at Piteşti. The *Securitate* presented it as an initiative of the detainees themselves, most of whom were students and members of right-wing parties. Beaten and starved, then tempted with promises of freedom and jobs, a few of the detainees were convinced to torture their cellmates, in order to 'reeducate' them and turn them into useful builders of the communist society. The result: 30 detainees were killed, more than 780 tortured, out of which 100 were left with great infirmities; some committed suicide in order to escape torture, and others went mad.

[6] *Virgil Ierunca* (b.1920): real name Virgil Untaru, Romanian literary critic, writer and publicist living in France since 1947. Ierunca has been one of the harshest critics of the Romanian communist regime. The *Securitate* tried to assassinate him.

[7] *André Malraux* (1901-1976): French writer and politician.

[8] *Grigore Gafencu* (1892-1957): studied law in Geneva and obtained his doctorate in Paris. Member of the National Peasant Party, Romanian Foreign Minister between 1938-1940, later founding member of the Romanian National Committee (Comitetul National Roman, CNR) together with General Nicolae Rădescu and eight other politicians and diplomats.

[9] *Constantin Vişoianu* (1897-1994): former Romanian Foreign Minister appointed at Titulescu's recommendation as a member of the General Secretariat of the League of Nations in Geneva, ex-minister to Hague and Warsaw, ex-foreign policy counsellor of Iuliu Maniu, participant in the secret negotiations with the Allies in Cairo in 1944. Went into exile in 1946 aided by the American Legation in Bucharest. Led the Romanian National Committee until its dissolution

in 1975. Represented Romania at the Meeting of the European Captive Nations in Strasbourg.

[10] *Imre Nagy* (1896-1958): Hungarian Prime Minister between 1953-55. During the anticommunist uprising of 1956, which he had initiated through his political reforms and his attempt to take Hungary out of the Soviet zone of influence and the Warsaw Pact, he was called back to lead the country. After he was removed from power by the Soviet troops, the communist authorities in Bucharest offered him political asylum at the suggestion of the Soviets. Once he entered Romania, he was arrested and interrogated by Soviet agents at a secret Securitate location. He was then sent back to Hungary, where he was tried as a traitor to the communist cause, sentenced to death and executed.

[11] *mămăligă*: Romanian word for polenta or maize porridge, a peasant staple. In communist Romania, *mămăligă* also became a symbol of the control excercised by the state over the population: *"Mămăliga nu explodează"* or "Polenta doesn't explode" was a phrase that, in the '80s, was often used to describe the resignation of Romanians to their fate under communism. The phrase began to become invalid on November 15th, 1987, when workers in Braşov openly demanded the end of the Ceauşescu regime, and then finally became obsolete through the revolution of 1989, which removed Ceauşescu from power.

[12] *Dâmboviţa*: river in southern Romania, 268 km long, running through Bucharest.

[13] *Ştefan Augustin Doinaş* (1922-2002): real name Ştefan Popa, Romanian poet and academician. Between 1996 – 2000 he represented the Civic Alliance Party, the political party of Romanian intellectuals, in the Senate.

[14] *Sibiu Literary Circle*: founded after the Romanian University at Cluj was moved to Sibiu as a result of the Vienna Dictate (1940), which ceded the northern part of Transylvania to Hungary. One of the most fruitful cultural organizations in Transylvania.

[15] *Lucian Blaga* (1895-1961): Romanian poet, playwright and philosopher. Marginalized by the communist regime, who kept him under constant surveillance, as proven by documents recently published by his daughter. After his death first his poems, then his philosophical writings were reissued.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to all Romanians who, during the forty years of communist bondage, were persecuted, arrested, tortured and unjustly sentenced to long years in prison.

Adriana Georgescu

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Because this book was written during the Stalinist period, the names of certain people and localities were changed, making it impossible for the communist police to identify, harass and arrest the people with whom I was in contact.

PART ONE

"In the beginning was the end"

I

In July, 1943 a small incident, apparently of no importance, changed my whole life. I was twenty-three and until then my life had followed a quiet course in the direction I wanted it to take, in the exact direction I thought I could give it.

I wanted to be a lawyer, and I had just graduated. I wanted to do sports, and I had already taken part in a few national championships in volleyball and table tennis. I wanted to be a journalist, and for the last year I had written the movie column for *Universul Literar*[1]. I was also a nurse in a military hospital.

Then, in July, 1943, on the very day of the graduation exam, it all started. It must have been on a Friday...

✦

I have just learned the result of the exam. My colleagues want to celebrate the event by inviting me out for dinner. I turn them down: I am on duty at the hospital. I leave them and go down the stairs. A colleague catches up to me: „Adriana, please give me your permit."

I give it to him. I seldom have the permit with me. My university friends are much more passionate about movies than I am. I only go once a week, to do my column. When one works in a hos-

[1] *Universul Literar* : literary magazine that, during the WWII years, invited contributions from writers and intellectuals irrespective of their political position.

pital, one sees too many dead, too many wounded. And the movies in Bucharest are almost exclusively German...

✦

Night shift at the hospital. Duty in the ward of those near death. In every bed the same closed eyes, the same gasping breath, the same cracked lips that open only to ask for water, and for water again.

At one a.m. another nurse comes to relieve me. I have to go to the operating room. Three operations. The drone of the planes in the sky above the hospital is drowned in the smell of chloroform, in the metallic clatter of the shiny instruments the assistants pass to the chief surgeon, in the sound of gasping breaths that dominate the night as it slowly passes away.

✦

At six in the morning we accompany the chief surgeon to the car that waits in front of the entrance. The crisp air of the morning burns my eyes. In the emergency room a doctor is helping me with my coat, when Gheorghe, a colleague from the newspaper, appears.

– I have to talk to you immediately.

At this hour? What must have happened for Gheorghe to come to the hospital at such an hour?

– You can talk in front of the doctor, he is a childhood friend.

– Grab your purse and come right away. I have to talk to you alone. It's secret.

I take my purse and follow him. Before I leave I tell the doctor:

– I'll be back shortly.

– No, you are not going to come back, says Gheorghe, once the door is closed. They are looking for you... *Siguranța*[2]. Don't be so surprised. The censors have warned you a few times. You should

[2] *Siguranța:* Security and information service within the Police and General Security Directorate of the Romanian Interior Ministry. Abolished by the communist regime in 1948, when it was replaced by the General Directorate of the People's Security (later known as the *Securitate*), based on the Soviet NKVD. Between 1945 -1948, communist agents who had infiltrated *Siguranța* acted as a political police force against the democratically oriented political groups and individuals.

have laid low. Why did you have to be so critical of the German movies? The censors agreed to only seven lines from your last column.

– I wrote what I thought.

– The result: police came looking for you at the paper and at home. They are waiting for you at both places.

He seems scared. My legs feel rubbery.

– I'll go say good-bye to the doctor and the nurse.

– Are you crazy? They'll come looking for you here as well. Outside there is a car waiting. You must leave immediately. I always thought you were irresponsible.

I shrug.

– Where do you want me to go?

– We are going to hide you; this is not the moment for conversation. Let's leave before the police get here.

He grabs my hand and pulls me after him. I add:

– You think it's that bad?

Gheorghe stops and says, furiously:

– Listen, you have to decide. Do you want to disappear, or would you rather pay a little visit to the Gestapo?

The idea of the Gestapo scares me. I follow Gheorghe, running without another word. A car is waiting downstairs. Speeding through the city. Grey dawn.

II

I don't understand what's happening. I have become a brunette. I have false papers and live in Câmpulung[3]. Gheorghe didn't lie. Before reaching Câmpulung I almost fainted from fear a few times. And I used to hate detective stories... I live in a house in a town I don't know. A provincial town, nice and peaceful. A house where I don't feel at home. At least I didn't in the beginning. Now I am getting used to it.

I share a room with a young woman my age, a Jew named Coca. She is also hiding. In another room, four men. In the living room, the owners, Sandu and Jana. Sandu belongs to a resistance group, he is the organizer. After eight at night the house is quiet. We listen to BBC and Voice of America. Jana records the Allied communiqués in shorthand. Afterwards we duplicate them on the linotype. The front gets closer and closer.

On the streets of Câmpulung the Nazi soldiers pass in disarray. At night the four men distribute the leaflets. One of the men, Tudor, has a car. Coca always sits in the car next to the driver. Everybody is happy. I have trouble fitting in. Jana thinks I take too seriously the fact that the police are after me. Maybe she is right.

Still, I am very much afraid, but I don't show it too much. I can't get used at all to the young brunette with my features whom I see in the mirror. To the false papers, in the name of Johanna Müller, even less. A hundred times a day I repeat this name which should be mine. I try to tame it, to make it mine.

Often I think of the hospital that I had to leave so suddenly. Was it bombed? For the last few months Bucharest has been bombed

[3] Câmpulung: small town on the slopes of the Southern Carpathian Mountains, ca. 160 km north-west of Bucharest.

almost daily by British and American planes. I am not allowed to send letters.

✦

My fellow inmates admire me for attacking the Nazis. I tell them again and again that there was nothing admirable about it. I simply found the Nazi movies, with their slogans, their buzz-words, their racist ferocity, odious and I said that. That was all. Sandu and the men think I will be a political star tomorrow. I know they are wrong. I try to convince them, but in vain. I have never been involved in politics. I only know that I hate the war, this nightmare with which we all struggle.

✦

I turn twenty-four on the 23rd of July, 1944. The first year that nobody wishes me happy birthday. A day like any other, like all the others in the year I have been living in this house. The same frantic, slightly disorganized activity. The men found an abandoned German truck filled with white paper. We are printing twice as many leaflets as before. Tonight, American planes passed over Câmpulung on their way to Bucharest. It was the only noteworthy thing today.

✦

The days are the same, always the same. The town is animated and filled with excitement. The front is getting closer to our borders. I am in a state of uneasy peace, like a body of water regularly agitated by winds. Trapped in this tiresome waiting... I can't think straight.

✦

No more night rides in the car. For camouflage we turn off all the lights after ten. We go to bed early and wake up at four in the morning to listen to the communiqués. All the alarm clocks in the house start ringing madly at a quarter to four. I wake up feeling uneasy every time.

✦

The night of the 23rd of August, 1944[4], I have just fallen asleep when a pounding at the door makes me jump. Sandu in pyjamas, yells:

– Armistice, girls, armistice! Quick... to the radio. The King is speaking!

Sandu is bouncing like a ball and the yard is lit up. No more camouflage? Maybe I am not dreaming, since Sandu keeps jumping and yelling. Every time he touches the ceiling lamp, which swings wildly.

We run and listen, holding hands, quiet, moved. Only Sandu talks loudly:

– Wonderful! The British and the Americans are our allies. We will fight the Germans, alongside the Russians, you'll see, we'll be free.

We embrace, we are all in a state of mad happiness. We sing all the national anthems loudly: Romanian, the Marseillaise, God Save the King, the American. We would like to be perfect democrats, but none of us knows The International.

Next day when I enter it, the room where we danced and sang all night, seems strangely sad. Empty glasses and bottles on the floor. Shafts of dusty light struggle through the thick curtains. The cigarette butts give off an acrid, musty odour. I open all the windows wide and search for music, any music, on the radio. Anything to interrupt and break this strange and sinister spell. I go into the yard, calling Coca and the rest to help me clean up. The first to appear is Jana, in a night gown. She mumbles, crying:

– Paris was liberated.

Jana spent her youth there. I have never been to Paris, but my throat tightens and the earlier sadness gives way to great happiness. I leave Jana stupefied with happiness repeating: "Paris was

[4] 23rd of August, 1944: the day of the coup d'état initiated by the young King Michael I of Romania against Marshall Ion Antonescu, as a result of which Romania broke the alliance with Germany and joined the Allies. From then on the Romanian army fought against Nazi Germany until the end of WWII on May 9th, 1945. Between 1948 and 1989 the communists unjustly took credit for initiating the coup. They proclaimed the 23rd of August as the Romanian national holiday.

liberated," and run to tell the others. I find Coca in front of the door talking to Tudor, who has just arrived. They are both agitated and waving their arms. I yell from afar:

– Paris was liberated!

– I know, says Tudor, but we'll enjoy that later. For the moment try to wake up this fool who doesn't want to understand.

– Why wake her up?

– Because you must go to the countryside.

– You want to get married in the countryside, in an idyllic setting?

– Don't be stupid, the Russians are coming!

– Big news. We know it too, believe me. The Russians are our allies. The war is over. The armistice has been signed. No more camouflage, no more bombing. Here is the full communiqué. See, we are up to date too.

– Another fool! Understand, woman, things are not as simple as we thought. I hope that we haven't been happy for nothing, but, for the moment, everybody goes to the countryside. The Russians are going to pass through Câmpulung. Dress quickly and don't ask me anything. We must leave, I have an order to take you all. An order, understand?

I look at him carefully. He left at dawn happy, and now the look in his eyes has changed. Order? Another move? I don't understand what's going on. I still have in me a sort of light. I can't analyze anything. Nevertheless, I feel that days and nights with a wind of madness are coming.

✢

Half an hour later we and our luggage get into Tudor's car. We don't know where we are going; we don't know for how long we are going to be gone; we don't even know if we can laugh about this new and absurd adventure.

✢

Jana, Coca and I have a quiet room in a peasant's house. In the other room lives an old woman. Her only son is "somewhere on the front". A childhood friend of Sandu. I still don't understand what

we are doing here, even though we arrived three days ago. We don't talk much, we watch the scenery, by now very familiar, through the windows.

The men commute between Câmpulung and this god-forsaken place. Even when they are here we almost don't see them. The house has no electricity for the radio; they go to listen to the news at the Town Hall and then come to tell us.

✦

The fourth night since we arrived. After all that has happened, every nightfall stirs up our emotions, due to the darkness and to our imaginations running wild. A dull noise, then a light at the back-yard gate. We get up. I grab Jana's hand. The Russians? Quiet. Voices, actually only one very low voice, Sandu's. Face drawn, in semi-darkness, it is almost unreal. He has come from Câmpulung and tells us the news very slowly, as if he is afraid we won't hear it.

The Germans have been bombing Bucharest for four days. For a day they controlled Băneasa airport; now they have the one in Buzău[5], and can thus, taking turns, bomb Bucharest twenty-four hours a day. They hit the Royal Palace, the University, the North Station, the neighbourhoods around Cişmigiu[6], they destroyed the National Theatre. More damage than in five months of American bombing! Our troops fight against them around Bucharest, which is surrounded.

Suddenly I am engulfed in visions: Cişmigiu, my street, my streets; dust settling over all that was. Jana is sobbing. Suddenly we don't belong in this room; we all leave, only in our imagination of course. For all the other departures, the real ones, we must first wait for the Russians to pass through.

✦

The rumours that circulate from village to village are faster than

[5] Buzău: town ca. 110 km north-east of Bucharest, near the border of Romania's old historical provinces of Muntenia (Wallachia) and Moldova (Moldavia).

[6] Cişmigiu: large park in the center of Bucharest, designed in the 19th century by German landscape architects.

the Russians, so we learn about a sort of an invasion of savages very much unlike the allied and friendly army promised by the radio communiqués.

We hear about rapes, serial robbery. Maybe they are only rumours. More convinced than us, the men took the car engine out, broke and damaged a few parts here and there, and put the car in the barn between two pigs and a cow. We curse them. We think it would have been better to take the car and go to Bucharest. We make them laugh. They tell us another current rumour, the Russians "rape" three "objects": watches, women and cars.

✦

Jana woke up first that morning. She yells to us to look outside. A number of men riding hunched over small horses, spurring them on; from the horses hang various objects: pieces of carpet, ribbons, dresses, bottles. Some are whipping their horses, yelling.

We are almost amused by the show. They look very much like the pictures in our 8th grade history books: Attila's hordes on their way to Europe.

The voice of the old woman suddenly breaks our contemplation. She seems scared.

– Where are the men?

– At Câmpulung.

Her words remind us that we are in our night-gowns.

– Get dressed immediately. It looks like the invasion of the barbarians. I am going to hide you.

Three minutes later we are ready. We go out into the yard and toward the ice store in the back of the house next to the barn. After she lets us in and has closed the door, the old woman leans for a moment against it and says in a low voice:

– You got in just in time, praise the Lord!

The gate creaks. It's nobody we know, because the dog is barking.

We sit on the ice blocks and cover each other with straw. We mustn't talk. We are so frozen inside that we don't feel the coldness of these ice chairs. The steps in the yard get closer. Instinctively, we grab each other by the hand and form a chain. Each hand almost crushes the other. When the steps move away we release

the hold. We hear the first Russian word: *Davai* [7].

What does it mean? More steps. Pretending that she is quieting the dog the old woman talks loudly, so we can hear her:

– Don't talk. They broke the mirrors in the rooms. They are looking for women. They are drunk. Keep quiet.

The dog barks wildly. A shot from a hand gun. Did they kill the dog? *Davai*. We hear the old woman sobbing.

✦

How long have we been sitting like this, listening to the horses' hooves, the stray shots and these *Davais* ? We are paralyzed, inert, afraid. We can no longer keep track of the minutes and hours passing.

Suddenly the door opens. Forgetting prudence, Coca lets out a sort of yell, a deep, throaty sound. In the door frame, lit by a flashlight, are Sandu and the old woman.

– You can come out now.

We get up staggering and try to shake loose the straw covering us. Next to Sandu is a man in a Russian uniform. Sandu laughs sheepishly.

– Stop making these funeral faces. Your host called us at Câmpulung. I went with Tudor to see Şandor. You know, the communist he has been hiding for a month. This officer is a friend of his, a Bessarabian[8].

I asked him to come and "save" you. So here we are.

---

[7] *Davai* : Russian, "come on", or, in this context, "give me".

[8] Bessarabia: historically a Romanian province, part of Moldavia, bordered by the rivers Dnister, Prut, and Danube, and by the Black Sea. The territory was annexed at various times by the Ottoman Empire and Russia, which subjected it to a harsh regime of Russification, especially after 1812. In the secret non-aggression pact signed on August 23rd, 1939 by Germany and the Soviet Union, Hitler accepted the occupation of Bessarabia, then belonging to Romania, by the Soviet army (which occurred on June 28th, 1940). After Romania entered the war in June 1941, Bessarabia was liberated and reintegrated with Romania, but in 1944 Soviet troops occupied the territory again and annexed it to the USSR. Today, the territory belongs in part to the Ukraine and in part to the Republic of Moldova, an independent state that came into being after the dissolution of the USSR.

My head is spinning and I lean on the door. I can't follow Sandu's intricate explanations. What counts is that he is here, that the Russian officer came to save us.

Sandu introduces us to the "saviour". The first Russian that doesn't say *Davai*. He speaks Romanian with a strong accent. Blue eyes, cold, impersonal. He apologizes in his own way:

– Evidently, regrettable things happened, but inevitable for any occupation army.

Occupation army?

We follow the old woman into the house to get our luggage. We realize we spent the whole day and part of the night in the ice shed. It must be five in the morning, judging from the pale dawn light. I look at myself in a piece of mirror, my face is very swollen. I am shivering and my teeth are chattering. I look at Jana and Coca: the ice treatment wasn't any better for them either, their faces are round, huge. Coca's face also has a strange greenish hue. She is hobbling, we must help her climb into the truck waiting in front of the gate. The old woman doesn't want to stay behind alone, so she is coming to Câmpulung as well. Going through the yard we see the dog sprawled on the ground, killed by the bullet we heard before. We drag away the old woman, who has started to sob, and climb into the truck.

It has been drizzling for half an hour. The truck is not covered and the rain seeps insidiously through our light clothing. Sandu takes a piece of a Persian rug, shaped like a triangle, from the truck cabin and tries to cover us. The dawn is long this morning, and we are still immersed in a grey light. In the truck, aside from Coca, Jana, Sandu and I, are two Russian soldiers.

Suddenly, Jana starts laughing so loudly that I think she is having a nervous break-down. She points toward one of the soldiers who is admiring with evident satisfaction four watches on his wrist. He checks the time, seemingly comparing the watches, an enchanted, childish smile on his lips. The other seems sadder or older. Anyway, he only has one watch. He gets up, heads toward Jana and asks:

– *Papirosi*?

The second Russian word we have heard in the last twenty four hours. Sandu offers him a cigarette, and I understand the meaning of *papirosi*. But *davai*?

We meet another column of Russian soldiers. There are a few horses loaded with all sorts of objects, pillows on their heads, or covered with rugs, and near them some soldiers, clearly drunk, wobble on their feet and block the road singing to their hearts' desire.

The truck has to stop. Our officer climbs down, takes off his gloves, and starts hitting the drunks conscientiously with his whip; he then climbs back in the truck, puts on his gloves and tells us:

– These are a disgrace to our glorious Red Army.

We start again and speed through empty villages. Houses with open doors, broken windows, seemingly inhabited by ghosts. It's day now, but it is still drizzling.

✦

I have been in bed for the last two days, back in the same room in Câmpulung. The ice treatment didn't suit me. I am shivering, have fever and my face is still swollen.

Coca goes out often with the Russian officer, Tudor and Sandu. Jana goes with them sometimes and at night the two women share the room with me. Coca has decided to join the Patriot's Union, a pro-communist association. Jana doesn't agree, and the two fight late into the night with childish arguments.

Tonight the discussion is heating up and I just can't take it anymore. I get up, put on my coat and go out into the yard. I must go as soon as possible to Bucharest, go back to my life, and find my colleagues, my friends. I have had it with being pushed by events like a leaf in the wind. The current drama of my life seems absurd; I have to put order in my head, which feels like it is splitting.

✦

I take the train with Coca and Tudor. We are squeezed into a third class car. The train stops for hours in small stations to let pass numerous Romanian military convoys heading for the front. At the

head of each train a car with the red flag with the hammer and sickle. On the cars, written in chalk: "Long live the Soviet-Romanian Friendship".

Of all the news that circulated on the grapevine in our train, like in a newspaper room, I recall two.

First: Radio Moscow announced three days ago that "the glorious Red Army, after heroic fighting, liberated Câmpulung, chased away the Germans, and was received with flowers by a deliriously happy population."

But I was in Câmpulung. The Germans had left a while ago, there was no fighting, and the population was hiding in their homes after carefully locking their gates. There were, in fact, a few rapes and robberies. Even now "the Glorious Red Army" is responsible, every night, for more of the same. If all the news from Radio Moscow was as truthful as this report, which I was able to check myself...

The second: at Iaşi, the capital of Moldova[9], Romanian troops, who, following orders, were trying to make contact with the Russian troops, were disarmed by the latter, made prisoners and deported to Russia.

I can't believe it's true; on the other hand I can't convince myself it's pure fantasy either.

The train stops in Chitila[10]; from there we must reach Bucharest on our own.

There are about ten kilometers left. We find a wagon heading toward the city and we settle, Coca, Tudor and I, more or less comfortably amidst the lettuce and the fruit. In the fields, on both sides of the road, corpses putrefy. The uniforms are intact: Germans and Romanians. I don't see any corpses in Russian uniforms. Did they "free" Bucharest like they did Câmpulung?

We cross the outskirts and the working class neighbourhoods... they are almost entirely destroyed. A closet still leans against the only wall of a building without floors. A few women, holding their

---

[9] Moldova (in English, Moldavia): bordered to the west by the Carpathian Mountains and to the east by the river Prut, it is one of the three main provinces of Romania. Not to be confused with the present-day Republic of Moldova, an independent state which came into being after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

[10] Chitila: small town on the outskirts of Bucharest.

children by the hand, search through the rubble. Telegraph lines and posts form strange geometrical figures, like in an abstract painting. I believe I started crying because Tudor looks at me in a strange way.

I must understand what's happening!

III

I have found Bucharest, my house, the shadow of my former life. Dust covers everything. I tear up my false papers, and the memory of my false identity gradually leaves me.

For a few days I immerse myself in this unhoped-for happiness; I straighten everything, clean, touch quietly, taking my time, each object. I restore my soul and my self-image.

And then, suddenly, a strange frenzy takes hold of me that makes me call all over town to try to renew old ties, to reconnect my old life with my present one. I don't find my friends, my colleagues. Has nobody yet returned to Bucharest? After five days as a recluse I realize my wallet is empty. I must find work; anyway, I can't live in this vague and shifting land, lacking reality, that is my current loneliness.

Because the last two nights the streets of Bucharest have been calmer, no more gunshots or cries, I decide to go to my newspaper. There was no answer on the phone, but maybe the lines are cut.

I must have left at nine in the morning on that day.

I walk the streets of bombed houses lit by the autumn sun. The same sun shines on people's faces, people made poor by the bombing and the robberies. They look lonely amidst ruins that seem to ask to be forgotten.

The same sun shines on those in foreign uniforms: the Russians. Men and women soldiers. The women, with round faces and light hair, have old fashioned shoes with high heels. Some wear decorations; strange petticoats show sadly from under their uniforms. They are silk nightgowns. I stop, amazed: one of them has a bra over her military uniform. I feel a sudden pang in my heart and forget the army that robs and steals. I only see these awkwardly stylish women. I try to imagine their life, the clothes they used to wear before the uniforms. Maybe they never had anything but a uniform. I can't distinguish one from the next, they seem to me interchangeable.